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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 001435

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVELLE, D. TEITELBAUM  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2009

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SUBJECT: "FIRST BOYFRIEND" RELEASED

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5 b/d

1. (SBU) The GOZ released Politburo member and prominent businessperson James Makamba from remand prison on August 24. Makamba had been incarcerated since January on charges relating to currency externalization, but was widely reputed to have been put away for cuckolding the President. Regional media coverage had been alluding increasingly to his putative affair with the First Lady.

2. (C) Makamba family sources (Makamba is the uncle of an FSN's spouse) confided that retired General and ZANU-PF heavyweight Solomon Mujuru had weighed in heavily on Makamba's behalf over the past few months. According to the family, first Lady Grace also had called Makamba's wife repeatedly to apologize of late. Makamba had been held in appalling conditions in remand prison, forced to endure repeated exercises while naked and other circumstances he was unwilling to discuss. He had regular close contact with prominent fellow inmates Finance Minister Chris Kuruneri (characterized as a "suicide candidate") and recently released safari magnate Emmanuel Fundira (also jailed for currency externalization). The family is concerned that Makamba may yet be re-arrested.

3. (C) COMMENT: The Makamba affair may not have played out fully but already offers some lessons. First, the ruling party can be even more heavy handed on its own than it is on its critics -- Makamba and Kuruneri have been in jail far longer than any opposition figure. The saga also indicates the extent to which the ruling party is wrapped around the axle over non-substantive personal rivalries -- Makamba's fate has absorbed far more attention from the state media and party's upper echelons than have many of the country's myriad real policy challenges. It further indicates the publicly invisible Mujuru's continuing influence, although the objectives of its exercise in this case are unclear. And although the media's growing flirtation with the lurid may have impelled Mugabe's late lenience, the theme of forgiveness and re-inclusion with diminished status is consistent with Mugabe's rhetoric and -- depending on political expedience -- historical behavior. And a lesson last but not least: don't fuss with the First Lady.  
Schultz